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## NOTES ON CHRISTIAN MOSAICS.

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### II.

#### THE PORTICO OF THE LATERAN BASILICA.

[PLATE XIV.]

Of late years, the Roman school of architects, sculptors and painters of the XII, XIII and XIV centuries has been receiving some of the attention it deserves as an important factor in the early revival of the fine arts in Italy; a revival which we, misled by Vasari, have been too prone to attribute entirely to the Tuscan schools. Unfortunately, not many of the works of this Roman school remain in Rome itself: the greater part were swept away by the iconoclastic mania of the Renaissance. But whoever may undertake the rehabilitation of this interesting School will find their works scattered through all the small towns of the Roman States: from the Neapolitan provinces on the South to the borders of Tuscany on the North, including a great part of Umbria. I hope to make known, some day, several of the Umbrian churches built by Roman architects from the XI to the XIII century, as they are among the most noble specimens of Italian Romanesque.

These Roman artists formed themselves into schools, sometimes confined to members of one family, which handed down their artistic traditions through several generations. These artists united, to a remarkable degree, varied talents, and often practised the three arts in their several branches. The best-known of these families is that which is popularly called the "Cosmati," to whom we attribute that beautiful style of mosaic ornamentation which was lavished on pulpits, thrones, tombs, confessions, screens, and other forms of church furniture and architecture. The "Cosmati" worked principally in Rome, but extended their sphere far on either side: to Orvieto on the north, and down to Anagni and the Abruzzi. The school of Paulus, which originated at the close of the XI century, seems to have worked mainly in the provinces; while that of the Vassalletti (XII-XIII) is found both in

and out of Rome.<sup>1</sup> There are many artists whom we have not yet been able to relate to any of these known families.

The artist, one of whose hitherto unknown works will be described in this paper, had the same remarkable versatility that belonged to so many of this School. The work itself has been noticed, though very imperfectly, but its authorship has never been discovered. NICOLÒ DI ANGELO, or NICOLAUS ANGELI, was a noted Roman artist of the latter half of the XII century about whom we know somewhat more than of most of his contemporaries. As an architect, he is known to have built, with Giacomo di Lorenzo of the "Cosmati" school, the confession of San Bartolommeo all' Isola, at Rome, under Alexander III (c. 1180);<sup>2</sup> an inscription with the date 1170, given by Promis, attributes to him and his son the altar of the cathedral of Sutri;<sup>3</sup> and he was employed on the Basilica of San Lorenzo at Rome. As a sculptor, he is known to have executed, with Pietro Vassalletto,<sup>4</sup> the Paschal candlestick of the Basilica of San Paolo, one of the most remarkable examples of early Italian sculpture. He has been regarded, then, as only architect and sculptor: the present paper will show that he was also a good mosaicist.

In the Middle Ages, the front of the Lateran Basilica had attached to it an open portico, the architrave of which was divided horizontally into three narrow sections: above, a decoration of sculptured heads supported the roof; in the centre, a broader band was adorned with mosaics, in compartments separated by roundels; below, was the famous inscription, DOGMATE PAPALI DATVR AC SIMVL IMPERIALI, QVOD SIM CVNCTARVM MATER, etc., still preserved in the modern façade: on the pier at the southern end of the portico and immediately under the above-mentioned inscription were the words, NICOLAVS ANGELI FECIT HOC OPVS, showing him to be the architect of the portico, and the author of its mosaic decoration. This latter inscription passed unnoticed, and was destroyed with the portico when the façade was rebuilt under Clement XII. The only remaining trace of it is in the engraving of the façade in Ciampini's *De Sacris Aedificiis à Constan-*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Stevenson's remarks on this family, reported in De Rossi's *Bull. di Arch. Cristiana*, 1880, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> A. Ricci, *Storia dell' Architettura in Italia*: Roma, 1848-53, vol. I, pp. 358, 378.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 549.

<sup>4</sup> *Bull. di Arch. Cristiana*, 1880, p. 90. The discovery was made by Sig. Enrico Stevenson.

*tino Magno constructis* (Romae, 1693, tab. 1). The inscription is given quite plainly, but apparently escaped the observation of all Roman archæologists. The only writer who has noticed it is Mgr. Rohault de Fleury in his monumental work, *Le Latran au Moyen-Age*. But he wrongly considers "Nicolo Angeli" to be a Tuscan of the same family as the biographer of Giacomo Turrilli (!), and to have lived c. 1290 under Nicholas IV. He was evidently ignorant of the existence of a XII century Roman artist. Ciampini, who also asserts the mosaics to have been executed under Nicholas IV, follows Pompeo Ugonio,<sup>5</sup> who is also Rohault de Fleury's authority. But the attribution of the mosaics to the earlier date is not merely on the faith of the inscription of Nicolaus. Johannes Diaconus, who seems to have lived after the middle of the XII century and who dedicated his work to Alexander III, gives the long inscription of the portico in his monograph on the Lateran. The dispute as to whether this writer may not have flourished toward the middle of the XIII century does not affect this question, as a description of the Lateran, identical with his, is found in manuscripts that evidently belong to the XII century. It is known that under Pope Alexander III (1159-81) the basilica underwent considerable repairs; and it is reasonable to attribute to this period the portico with its mosaic, as this date would accord perfectly with those of Nicolò's other works and with the age of the above-mentioned description of the Lateran.

The miniature mosaics of the Portico seem to have suffered severely from neglect; and when Ciampini wrote, at the close of the XVII century, more than half the compartments had entirely disappeared, and the remainder were in a ruinous condition. Apparently, there were originally more than a dozen subjects, but Ciampini engraved only eight. So far as may be conjectured from these, the series was taken from Roman history, and was especially full in incidents connected with the early history of Christianity in Rome. Ciampini himself

<sup>5</sup> "Papa Nicola IIII dell' ordine di S. Francesco fece rifare da fondamenti tutta questa facciata, ornandola di musaico, e fabricandovi il portico, che vediamo fondato sopra sei colonne, e vi scrisse quei versi in lode di questa chiesa che vi si veggono. *Dogmate Papali*, etc. Di questa fabrica di Nicola parlano quelle parole, che sono scritte nella Tribuna della Chiesa: *Partem anteriorem, et posteriorem huius sancti templi à fundamentis aedificari, et ornari fecit opere musaico Nicolaus Papa IIII filius B. Francisci*" (*Hist. delle Stationi di Roma*, 1588, p. 39). The *partem anteriorem* refers, strictly speaking, to the façade itself, but might be extended to the portico, did we not have the inscription of Nicolaus.

remarks, that these mosaics had not been noticed by any of those who had preceded him in the description of the Basilica. This is not quite correct, as Panvinio, more than a century before him, had referred to them.<sup>6</sup> After Ciampini, Furietti, in his historical sketch of mosaic painting (1752), also mentions them.<sup>7</sup>

Ciampini says (*De Sacris Aedificiis*, pp. 10–14): “Porticus contigatio sex magnis columnis innititur, tribus puris, totidem striatis, cum capitulis Doricis . . . Peristylum, et corona è Pario marmore sunt. Zophorus verò sat eleganter tessellis compactus, in quasdam areolas, sive lacunas distinguitur, inter quas jacent versicolorum, nec ignobilium marmorum orbiculi crustis conspicui. In iis autem areis, spatisque lapillis minutissimis expressae sunt adeò parvae, et exiles figurae, ut incognitae penè sint intuentibus . . . At injuriâ temporum factum est, ut quaedam ex illis, vel in totum corrosae deciderint, vel maximâ sui parte mutilae sint, et in dies cadant. Quod ego non leviter dolens, quae satis conspicuae sunt, et aliarum casui superstites, delineare, et hic spectandas, ut in Tab. II. explicandasque apponere, mecum eò satius duxi, quòd à nullo, qui de hac augustissima Basilica scripserit, ne leviter quidem fuerint indicatae.”

Ciampini's engravings are rough, small, and evidently inaccurate in detail; they give no clue to even the general style of the mosaics. Comm. de Rossi, however, was so fortunate as to discover, about four years ago, in a volume at the Barberini Library in Rome a series of six colored drawings or rather tracings of the mosaics, made, about fifty years before Ciampini, by order of that patron of art and learning, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, when the mosaics were not quite so dilapidated.<sup>8</sup> These are not all that were made, and three at least

<sup>6</sup> “Ante palatium Lateranense (cuius frons aliquando totus opere arcuato aptatus erat, hodie vero arcus omnes muro clausi sunt, praeter arcum portae palatii veteris, quae habet valvas aereas, a Caelestino III factas) est porticus antiqua versus septentrionem locata, ad quam per gradus scalae sanctae aditus est: olim fuit tota, et marmoreis tabulis incrustata, et variis e musivo emblematis ornata, nunc ea diruta, omnia fere vetustate consumpta sunt . . . Porticus ineptis quibusdam picturis exornata est. Supersunt etiam nunc tenuia quaedam vestigia veteris incrustaturae e lapillis tessellatis” (Onuphrii Panvinii, *De septem urbis ecclesiis*, etc: Rome, 1570, p. 181).

<sup>7</sup> “Basilicae Lateranensis frontem a solo aedificatam, adjecta porticu, ac musivariis imaginibus honestavit, ut ex Ugonio in suis Stationibus Urbis hausit Ciampinus; atque haec eadem musiva, prius quam novus ecclesiae prospectus, veteri disjecto, a Clemente XII construeretur, in porticu adhuc extabant,” etc. (Furietti, *De Musivis*: Rome, 1752, p. 94).

<sup>8</sup> The discovery of these drawings Comm. de Rossi kindly communicated to me, when

have been lost or mislaid, the first, second, and seventh. They are apparently of the exact size of the mosaics themselves, and measure 58 by 24 centimetres. The small designs of Ciampini differ from them so materially that hardly a single figure is the same: it is evident that these differences in attitude and drapery should in every case be decided in favor of the drawings, as they approach far nearer what must have been the style of the original, and also give all the details that are wanting in Ciampini's summary sketches.

Such a mosaic decoration as this was quite consistent with the general spirit of the Roman art of that period; which, while it showed in its architectural productions a simple massiveness that is truly admirable, had a tendency to decoration in all minor details,—a style which it carried to singular perfection, not only in cloisters and porticos, but in minor works. The mosaic ornamentation commonly employed was however generally decorative, and but few examples can be cited of figured mosaics of this minute description: one is to be found in the mosaics of the old portico of San Lorenzo outside the walls of Rome, which were executed under Honorius III, about 1216. In Ciampini's time two fragments of them still remained, of which he has given some very inferior illustrations: if the least reliance is to be placed on them, they show a complete degradation, and are far inferior to those of the Lateran. Another example, which I believe has never before been noticed, is in the well-known cloisters of the Lateran Basilica, which date from the beginning of the XIII century, and were the work of the Vassalletti, as Comm. de Rossi has proved: that it should have hitherto escaped notice is but another instance of how little apt we are to see familiar objects in detail. On a projection in the centre of one of the sides of the cloister, over one of the exits into the area, the ornamental mosaic frieze on the architrave contains two square compartments in which there still remain vestiges of the figured mosaics placed there by the artist of the XIII century. So dilapidated are they that in one of them no figures can be made out, and in the other, only by the most minute examination can a group of three figures be discerned, the central figure being seated: they may be conjectured to be Christ enthroned, with the Virgin standing on one side and John the Baptist on the other.

I told him of my discovery of the artist, and this enabled me to make a more accurate study of the subject.

To commence a detailed description of our Lateran mosaic: according to the order of Ciampini's engravings, the first subject represented the Roman fleet (of which four vessels are depicted) under Vespasian, on its way to Palestine: under it was inscribed, on a marble frieze, NAVES ROMANI DVICIS HAE SVNT VESPASIANI. The second scene takes us before Jerusalem besieged by Titus. In the two figures we ought probably to recognize Titus himself, seated, and before him a Roman soldier: the inscription is, REGIA NOBILITAS HIC OBSIDET ISRAELITAS. The colored drawings of both of these subjects are among those that are missing, so that there is no way of correcting Ciampini's rendering of the scenes. Next in order is the presentation by the Emperor Constantine to Pope Silvester of the privileges of the Roman Church, with the legend, REX IN SCRIPTVRA SYLVESTRO DAT SVA JVRA. This is, perhaps, the most interesting composition in the series (PL. XIV, 1). Pope Silvester is represented, in simple red and green robes, and with red nimbus and single tiara, seated on a throne in front of the Lateran Basilica: in front of him, in imperial robes of the Lower Empire, is the Emperor Constantine offering him an unrolled parchment, and accompanied by an attendant. Beyond the fact that Ciampini gives three figures and a building, there is no similarity between his engraving and the drawing. In Ciampini, the building is formless and the tower is omitted: while the colored drawing is evidently a careful reproduction of the original, and therefore an extremely valuable document, as showing the state of the church at the close of the XII century. It reproduces the south side of the Basilica on the square, showing part of the nave adorned with a clerestory of round-headed windows. The portico projects from the body of the church, and we see the end of it surmounted by a gable and serving as a side entrance.<sup>9</sup> The portico evidently had an architrave instead of an arcade, and was doubtless an example of the classic influence that still so strongly affected the mediæval artists of Rome. What the portico of the Lateran was may be easily conceived by a glance at the still-existing portico of the Cathedral of Civita Castellana, built not many years after (1210) by the Cosmati, Lorenzo and Jacopo. Its architrave and rough Ionic capitals connect it clearly with the basilicas of early Rome, especially that of Santa Maria Maggiore, and might lead one

<sup>9</sup> This arrangement had been already changed in the earliest designs of the Basilica that exist, anterior to Pope Sixtus V.

to attribute to the Roman school of 1200 an early Renaissance which failed by premature birth ; though perhaps it had its origin, not in any classic influence, but in that of early Christian architecture. Over the portico rises a fine campanile of which two stories of large round-headed windows appear above the church. If the design can be relied on, this tower, evidently Romanesque, was far more elegant in form and of larger lights than the usual Roman campanile. Its place is now occupied by a XIV century tower.

The subject of this composition, the presentation to Silvester, by Constantine the Great, of the privileges of the Roman Church, is taken from the well-known legend of the conversion of the first Christian Emperor, a legend that entirely superseded, during the Middle Ages, the historical fact as told by Eusebios and other early writers. As two more of these mosaics are taken from this legend, it may be well to give an outline of it here.<sup>10</sup> It runs thus : toward the beginning of his reign, Constantine persecuted the Christians, and obliged Pope Silvester to seek refuge in the caverns of Mt. Soracte. For this persecution he was afflicted with leprosy, to cure which he sent to Persia and India for magicians. The Emperor was counselled to sacrifice a multitude of children, and to bathe in their blood. In the usually accepted version (*Acts of St. Silvester*); the Emperor, on his way to execute this barbarous project, is moved to pity by the appeals of the mothers of these unfortunates. To reward him SS. Peter and Paul appear to him in a vision, induce him to send for Pope Silvester, to be converted and receive baptism, by which he is completely cured. Constantine then issues his decree in favor of the Christians, and orders a church to be erected in his Lateran palace. This is the point of connection between the legend and the Lateran basilica. This legend began to spread in the East and West early in the fifth century, and ancient documents in Greek, Latin, Syriac and Armenian attest its prevalence. The popularity of the apocryphal *Acts of St. Silvester* established it during the Middle Ages as the authoritative version ; and it was only at the Reformation that the historic truth began to be again noticed, and it was finally recognized that Constantine was not baptized until at the point of death, and then by Eusebios of Nikomedeia.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see *L'Omelia di Giacomo di Sarâg sul battesimo di Costantino imperatore, pubblicata, tradotta ed annotata da A. L. Frothingham, Jun.*: Roma, 1882 (*R. Accademia dei Lincei*).



The fourth mosaic compartment represented the legendary baptism of Constantine by Silvester, and had under it the verse, *REX BAPTIZATVR ET LEPRAE SORDE LAVATVR*. This incident was also, like the presentation of privileges, especially connected with the Lateran, as the baptism was said to have taken place in the famous font of basalt in the Lateran baptistery. In the centre of the mosaic is the Emperor partially immersed in the font; on the right, stand St. Silvester performing the rite, and a deacon bearing a processional cross; on the left, are two clerics wearing that form of the mitre which first came into use in the XII century. Ciampini, deceived by a lacuna in the mosaic, which he turned into rocks, thought he distinguished here St. Silvester on Mt. Soracte (PL. XIV, 2).

The subject of the fifth compartment is the martyrdom of one of the patron saints of the Basilica, John the Baptist. In the centre is the prison with its bars and gable: on the right is the kneeling figure of John the Baptist, the lower part of whose body alone is covered with yellow drapery; the nimbed head lies on the ground. The executioner, who stands with sword raised, is a coarse man of the people in the dress of that period, consisting of a red cap, a green jacket striped with white, a yellow jerkin striped with green, and red tights. He appears a second time, carrying in a vase the head of the Baptist.

In the sixth compartment is another incident in the legend of the conversion of Constantine, which connects it with the third and fourth subjects and suggests a possible error of arrangement by the copyist, though in the incorrect drawings of Ciampini the same order is given. The incident is the victory of Silvester over the great dragon of the Tarpeian rock. According to the legend, this dragon lived in a cave, was adored by magicians, and fed on human victims. Silvester wishing to put an end to its devastations, and inspired by St. Peter, shut the dragon in the cave, closing the entrance with heavy chains. Silvester is represented in the mosaic (in red and white robes) as placing a muzzle on the dragon, a polychromic animal of green, yellow, and red. Behind Silvester is the only person of the whole series that is robed entirely in white: he is holding a long double processional cross, and not a stick as appeared to Ciampini.

The drawing of the seventh subject is missing; and this is especially unfortunate, because Ciampini's drawing of it is extremely defective, and he was not himself able to explain its subject. There is a seated figure before which another stands: it may represent Silvester on Mt.

Soracte receiving the messenger of Constantine inviting him to return to Rome.

The last design in Ciampini, and the eighth of the colored series, represents the tortures inflicted on St. John the Evangelist. The apostle is represented, curiously enough, as quite young, naked and with his hands bound in front. An executioner on either side is tormenting him: the one on the left is raising his hand to strike him, but does not hold a scourge, as in Ciampini. Both these figures are brawny and fairly well drawn, wearing caps and dressed in close-fitting, short garments of red and green: one of them has red leggings trimmed with white. Further to the right St. John is seated, and one of the executioners is cutting off his hair with shears. Here we are able to complete the subject from the colored drawing, as it has preserved part of a figure which probably is that of the proconsul seated in the curule chair.

The last of the drawings gives a mosaic that had entirely perished in Ciampini's time, and which completes the series relating to St. John. The apostle is in the midst of the boiling oil, and extends both hands in prayer towards the figure of Christ appearing on the left. The Saviour is bearded, blesses with his right hand, and has a cruciform nimbus: his type is that of the native Italian school before the prevalence of Byzantine models in the XIII century. The figure is rather thick-set, and the drapery is well arranged in classic folds. The following inscription explains these last three scenes:

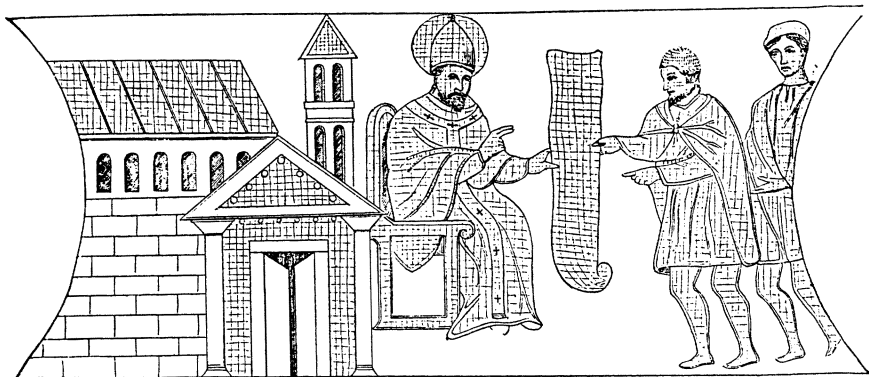
MARTYRIS CALICEM BIBIT HIC ATHLETA JOAÑES  
 PRINCIPII VERBUM CERNERE QVI MERVIT  
 VERBERAT HVC FVSTE PROCŌSVL FORFICE TŌDET  
 QVEM FERVENS OLEVVM LAEDERE NŌ VALVIT  
 CONDITVR HIC OLEVVM DOLIVM CRVOR ATQVE CAPILLI  
 QVAE CONSECRANTVR LIBERA ROMA TIBI.

This series of small mosaic compositions, placed between roundels of porphyry in the epistyle of the architrave of the porch, was evidently intended to form a complete and connected whole consisting of incidents intimately connected with the origin and associations of the earliest of great Christian basilicas: the Lateran palace; the legends of its patron saints; the story of its founders, the first Christian Emperor and Pope Silvester. It would be useless to conjecture what were the subjects of the compartments that were missing when the drawings were executed under Cardinal Francesco Barberini.

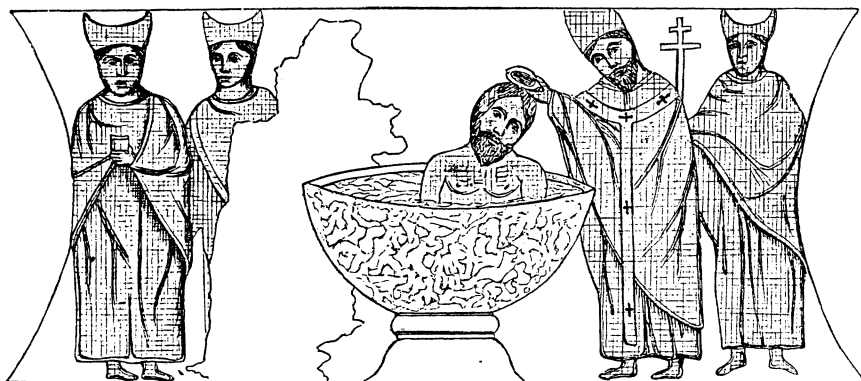
The native school of Roman mosaicists that did not follow Byzantine models, but held to Latin traditions, was evidently not accustomed at this time (end of XII cent.) to execute mosaics of any considerable size. The artists of the apse-mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere were probably not Romans; and when, at the beginning of the XIII century, Pope Honorius III wished to adorn the apse of San Paolo, he was obliged to send to Venice for mosaicists. At the same time, the Roman artists were skilled in small mosaic work, both ornamental and figured, and were successful whenever they confined themselves to it. Here they did not follow Byzantine models, and these small mosaics of the portico of the Lateran Basilica are a proof of it. They show a special type which was a national inheritance from the native school, and are of all the greater interest from being the earliest signed works of the school. The figures, as far as can be judged from the tracings, are thick-set; the drapery is ample and flowing in some cases, and in others the exact reproduction of cotemporary costume; there is no hesitation in drawing the nude figure, and in attempting the muscular development;—all characteristics quite in contrast with the ideal of the Italo-Byzantine school.

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2

MOSAICS OF THE PORTICO OF THE LATERAN BASILICA (XII CENT.).

*(Reduced from tracings of colored drawings of mid. xvii cent. in Barberini Library, Rome, which were traced from the original mosaics).*